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SUBJECT: SETTLERS "UNIVERSITY CENTER" PLANS TO DOUBLE IN
SIZE

REF: JERUSALEM 248

1. (SBU) Summary. The Ariel "University Center," an unaccredited Israeli university in the West Bank, plans to increase from 8,400 to 20,000 students by 2020, and build several more permanent buildings to accommodate and educate them, including a new 12,000 square meter library already under construction. Ariel's president claimed that a new industrial park is planned next to the college campus. According to an Ariel professor, the West Bank settler population has doubled in the past 12 years and could reach 540,000 by 2020. End summary.

PLANS FOR EXPANSION -----

2. (SBU) President of Ariel "University Center" Dan Meyerstein showed Poloff the campus "master plan" during a December 18 meeting. There are plans for a spacious new library, which is already under construction, a fitness center, several new academic buildings, and dormitory buildings to replace the caravans that currently house 1,600 students. The existing 2,400 square meter library will be joined by a new 12,000 square meter library, already under construction, and funded by U.S. private donors, according to Meyerstein. PolOff saw several buildings that were expanded recently, and two more buildings under construction.

3. (SBU) Meyerstein said that, of the college's 8,400 students, 500 live elsewhere in Ariel settlement, more than 1,000 are in nearby settlements, and 5,000 are from cities in Israel. Meyerstein said the college aims to increase the student body from 8,400 to 20,000 students by 2020. He noted that the college employs 1,000 people, including over 200 professors.

4. (SBU) Meyerstein said the campus was zoned in 1982 as an industrial park, but "demand for a center of higher education" in the West Bank led to the creation of the college. He said he hopes that an industrial park planned for the northeast of the campus will attract investors and provide students practical training opportunities.

CURRICULUM AND COOPERATION -----

5. (SBU) Meyerstein acknowledged that Ariel has not been accredited by the Israeli Ministry of Education, but received "university center" status about one year ago. He said he expects full accreditation of the college's degree programs "soon," which will allow him to add doctoral programs. Meyerstein blamed U.S. settlement policy for the college's lack of scientific research collaboration with U.S. universities, noting that its only partnerships are with Russian universities. According to Meyerstein, the college is advancing disciplines such as electro-optics,

biotechnology engineering, and robotics, including "smart" robots that can explore oil pipelines for leaks and unmanned ground vehicles capable of engaging in field reconnaissance.

WEST BANK SETTLER POPULATION COULD DOUBLE BY 2020

16. (SBU) Head of Social Sciences Dr. Dan Soen told Poloff that he recently published some of the results from his analysis of Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics information.

Soen said the settler population of the West Bank doubled in the past 12 years and is now 270,000. He noted that, while some settlers leave the West Bank, "more people are coming than going," and the settlers' birthrate is higher than that of Israelis (35 births per 1,000 settlers in the West Bank, versus 20 births per 1,000 Israelis in Israel). He said that, at the current rate, by 2020, the settler population could double again to 540,000 settlers.

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